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FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2411
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5727
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 6939

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - DAVID FIRESTEIN
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN'S COMMENT ON
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage September 30 - October 2 on the ongoing and follow-on movements of former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's campaign to oust President Chen Shui-bian; on a big rally held in Kaohsiung Saturday celebrating the DPP's twentieth birthday; on the second presidential recall motion, which is scheduled to be voted on at a Legislative Yuan plenary session on October 13; and on further investigation into the Presidential Office's special fund for state affairs. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest-circulation daily, ran an exclusive banner headline on page two October 2 that read "Blue and Green to Start Offense and Defense over Revision to the Referendum Law Today."

In addition, almost all papers September 30 carried on the inside pages the remarks made by State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack last Thursday, who was quoted as saying that "President Chen's fulfillment of his commitments will be a test of his leadership, dependability and statesmanship."

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" criticized President Chen's recent comments on constitutional reforms, saying Washington distrusts Chen and is treating him like a disobedient child now. A separate "Apple Daily" opinion piece said State Department Spokesman Tom Casey's remarks on September 25 implied that, should President Chen break his promise and make things difficult for Washington, "the United States will not rule out the possibility of taking a big action and making Chen and his leadership become history." An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" also stressed that Washington is not happy with Chen's repeated challenge to the United States' one-China policy. A "Liberty Times" editorial, on the other hand, discussed the possibility of Taiwan signing a free trade agreement with the United States. The article urged Taiwan to act proactively to enhance its economic and security relations with the United States. End summary.

13. President Chen Shui-bian's Comment on Constitutional Reform

A) "One Person Is in Trouble, While the Whole Party Shoulders [the Responsibility for Him]"

Columnist Antonio Chiang noted in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (10/2):

"... In a DPP meeting last week, A-Bian talked about the [future] direction for constitutional reforms, which touched on the territorial issue, and he got slammed by the United States again. Washington's perception of A-Bian is in proportion to how Taiwan's ruling and opposition parties are viewing him. The Americans acted

almost as if they disregard diplomatic courtesy; they are tired of him and distrust him, treating him like a disobedient child. But A-Bian is used to Americans' criticism; he has developed a self-defense psychological mechanism long ago and doesn't seem to care much about Washington's perception of him.

"Chen knows very clearly that he must not touch on issues of sovereignty and territory. He forgot that the president is not a commentator, and that he has no freedom of speech; [he also forgot that] every remark he makes stands for [the government's] policy, action, and direction. Every sentence he says will be go on the record, and his every idea will become a commitment. The fact that Americans have little faith in him has nothing to do with his personal credibility, but it will jeopardize Taiwan's interests as a whole. Even until today, Chen is probably unaware that his mouth has done much unnecessary harm to Taiwan, which has practically turned all his diplomatic efforts into nothing. ..."

B) "A-Bian's Flip-flopping Drives the United States Crazy"

Edward I-hsin Chen, professor at Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of American Studies, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (9/30):

"... This time, many senior U.S. officials have made harsh comments on Chen Shui-bian. They said Chen is clearly aware of where the 'red line' lies, but he is still running the risk, even though he knows what's in store for him; they said he should not play the game of 'lawyer's language' and that he should not play small tricks all the time just for his personal interests. But no statement came as serious as what State Department Spokesman Tom Casey said during a routine briefing September 25: 'Chen's fulfillment of his commitments will be a test of his leadership.' [This statement] not only sounded threatening but also implied that, should Chen break his promise and make things difficult for Washington, the United States will not rule out the possibility of taking a big action to make Chen and his leadership become history."

C) "President Chen's Red Herring"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/30):

"At a time when all the eyes of Taiwan's citizens are focused on President Chen Shui-bian's scandals of corruption, the embattled president has resorted to an old game by invoking his controversial 'two different states' theory to win support from his radical followers. Apparently, it is a tactic to divert public attention from the trouble that may doom his presidency and his political life. The anti-corruption protests led by his former comrade Shih Ming-teh have effectively deprived him of moral legitimacy to govern. The president has become not only a lame duck, but also a prisoner at the Presidential Palace. ..."

"It remains to be seen, however, whether it will work this time. Washington does not like it, as it is not consistent with his proverbial pledges to the contrary. In fact, Washington is not happy with Chen's repeated challenge to Washington's one-China policy. Chen should have learned a lesson from the shabby treatment he got in return from Washington for his provocative statements. ..."

14. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

"Act Proactively to Enhance Economic and Security Relations between Taiwan and the United States"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (9/30):

"... Some U.S. officials, while calling on Taiwan to open its trade and economic ties with China, only stressed the market function and completely overlooked the close link between economics and politics. In fact, China's attempt to hinder Taiwan and the United States from signing a free trade agreement was, by nature, a move made based on political considerations. Similarly, the United States' trade and economic exchanges with communist countries such as China are also closely related to politics. ..."

"Heavyweight U.S. congressmen have adopted positive and powerful moves over the past few days [i.e. calling for moves to strengthen U.S.-Taiwan economic relations], which not only coincide with U.S. interests but also speak up for the voices of the Taiwan people. We hope that U.S. administration agencies such as the U.S. Trade Representative will adopt concrete actions in line with Congress' [calls] and substantively enhance the economic and security relations between Taiwan and the United States. Our government should also strengthen its engagement with the United States and proactively push for the signing of a free trade agreement with the United States."

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